IN THE SPECIFICATION:

Following the claims, please insert the Abstract included separately herewith.

IN THE CLAIMS:

On page 36, please delete **"CLAIMS"** and insert --What is claimed is:--.

Please cancel claims 1, 5, 15, 16, and 18-20 without prejudice.

Please amend claim 2-4, 6-14 and 17 as follows.

Claim 2 (Amended). The process of claim 4 wherein said [A] protein, or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof, [according to claim 1 which] is functionally unglycosylated.

Claim 3 (Amended). The process of claim 4, [A protein or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof according to claim1 or 2] wherein the protein, or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof, is a transmembrane protein.

Claim 4 (Amended). A process for the preparation of a protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd, or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof, and capable of specifically binding to a protein of hepatitis C virus[according to any one of claims 1 to 3] comprising the steps of:

i) obtaining a membrane preparation from [the step of culturing] cells exhibiting binding to an HCV protein; and

ii) purifying said protein from said [a cell] preparation [a protein according to

any one of claims 1 to 3].

Claim 6 (Amended). A process according to any one of claims [claim] 2-4 [or 5] wherein the cells are selected and cloned to provide hyperexpression of the protein [according to any one of claims 1 to 3].

Claim 7 (Amended). A process according to any one of claims 2- 4 [to 6] wherein the [cell] preparation is purified by [subjected to an] ammonium sulphate precipitation [purification step] employing ammonium sulphate at between 33 and 50% saturation.

Claim 8 (Amended). A process according to any one of claims 2-4 [to 7] further comprising [wherein the purification involves] at least one [step of] hydrophobic interaction chromatography procedure.

Claim 9 (Amended). A process according to any one of claims 2-4 [to 8] further comprising [wherein the process involves] at least one [step of] acetone precipitation procedure.

Claim 10 (Amended). A process for the preparation of a protein according to any one of claims 2-4 [to 8], or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof, [wherein] comprising the steps of:

i) obtaining [preparing] a [plasma cell] membrane preparation from [of]

mammalian cells selected for binding to E2 [hyperexpression of the 24kd protein of the invention]; [,]

ii) precipitating [subjecting] the preparation with [to] ammonium sulphate [precipitation] at less than 33% saturation and retaining the supernatant; [,]

iii) precipitating [subjecting] the supernatant with [to] ammonium sulphate [precipitation] at between 33 and 50% saturation and retaining the precipitate; [,] and

iv) resuspending the precipitate from step iii) and subjecting the resuspended precipitate [it] to hydrophobic interaction chromatography.

Claim 11 (Amended). A method for treating a patient infected with [an infection of] HCV comprising administering to a patient an amount of a protein having a molecular weight of about 24kd [according to any one of claims 1 to 3], or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof, and capable of binding to a protein of Hepatitis C virus, effective to reduce the infectivity of the virus.

Claim 12 (Amended). A pharmaceutical composition comprising a protein having a molecular weight of about 24 kd [according to any one of claims 1 to 3], or a functionally equivalent variant or fragment thereof, and capable of specifically binding to a protein of hepatitis C virus [optionally as a pharmaceutical salt], in combination with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.